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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000680

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SUBJECT: MALI'S LARGEST PARTY PREPARING FOR 2012

REF: BAMAKO 580

Classified By: PolCouns Peter Newman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Although the next presidential elections are over two years away, Mali's political scene is already gearing up for what is expected to be a wide-open campaign. As the first declared candidates announce the start of their campaigns, Mali's largest political party, the Alliance for a Democratic Mali (ADEMA) is preparing itself to retake the presidency. While presenting distinct points of view, party leaders contend that ADEMA's diversity remains a strength, not a liability, and expressed optimism concerning the campaign ahead. End Summary.

2012 NOT AS FAR OFF AS IT SEEKS

¶2. (SBU) Although the next presidential elections are over two years away, Mali's political scene is already moving into high gear. The 2012 presidential contest is a wide-open affair: current President Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT) is an independent who has vowed to respect the Constitution and step down at the end of his second term. Some presidential hopefuls, such as Convention for Reflection and Action for Mali (COREAM) president Bamba Gagny Kiabou, have already announced their candidacies. Others, such as former NASA engineer and current Microsoft Chairman for Africa, Cheick Modibo Diarra, have begun laying the groundwork by participating in events across the country and seeking interviews with a variety of media outlets.

¶3. (SBU) Mali's largest political party ADEMA is seeking to reclaim what it lost in 2002 to ATT. In early September, the ADEMA Executive Committee re-activated its subject matter study groups (dormant since 2002) to draw up a presidential campaign platform for 2012. The party's study groups correspond to each of the Malian ministries. The work of the study groups had been suspended after ADEMA decided to work in alliance with ATT. The Malian press interpreted their re-activation as a sign that ADEMA is eager now to "push him toward the door."

DIVERSITY AND UNITY

¶4. (C) On September 28, the Embassy met with former Minister of Territorial Administration Ousmane Sy, who has served as ADEMA's National Political Secretary since August 2008. Sy noted that ADEMA needs to maintain the unity of the party while it crafts a successful political program. Sy emphasized that the party began as a collection of associations fighting for democracy during the dictatorship of Moussa Traore, and as an umbrella group, it is inherently diverse. The party generally adheres to a center-left line. Sy lamented that the party has no well-identified leader who can claim the allegiance of all of ADEMA's factions. If

ADEMA cannot agree on a platform, the disputes of 2002 that led to ATT's victory and the creation of ADEMA break-away parties URD and RPM are likely to repeat themselves.

¶15. (C) Regarding ADEMA's identity, Sy noted that when one looks for differences between the political parties, in terms of their projects for society, they are difficult to find. What differentiates ADEMA from its competitors, according to Sy, is that the other major political parties are centered on one strong leader who formed the party to advance his personal ambitions. ADEMA, by contrast, is defined by its historical commitment to democratic ideals.

¶16. (C) Sy noted that, 15 years into Malian democracy, government institutions have been weakened by the challenges and competing demands of governing. Sy appeared to subscribe to the consensual approach to Malian politics by arguing that the political parties needed to return to a "vision of sharing in the power of managing the institutions" of government.

THE WAY AHEAD

¶17. (C) Sy maintained that respect for term limits was something to which "everyone" subscribes. He said he was not opposed to the suggestion that the High Council of Collectivities be turned into a second legislative chamber, but noted that such a change would be expensive and that government institutions were very costly in a poor country like Mali. Sy also observed that ADEMA had put forth such a suggestion in 2002, but was unable to secure the votes in the

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National Assembly.

¶18. (C) On the economic front, Sy argued strongly for decentralization, a process he was responsible for initiating while serving as Minister of Territorial Administration. Sy lamented the unwillingness of the central government to surrender economic power to the municipalities, noting that 99 percent of public funds were controlled by the central government. Sy complained that current policy was to centralize all economic and administrative activity in Bamako, and "making a desert of the rest of the country." Sy also advocated public-private partnerships to stimulate job creation, and policies that recognized the importance of the informal sector of the Malian economy.

POLITICAL PARTIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY

¶19. (C) On September 29, the Embassy met with Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga, currently 5th Vice President of ADEMA and the party's 2007 presidential candidate. Maiga sounded a more cautious note than Sy on the subject of a third term for President Toure, stating simply, "if the Constitution remains in effect, this will be his last term." Maiga agreed with Sy that ADEMA needs to develop a political platform soon, as the open nature of the 2012 contest would result in a large number of candidates.

¶110. (C) Maiga echoed Sy's view that ADEMA's role in the fight for democracy in 1991-1992 was a rallying point. He similarly viewed ADEMA's diversity as a source of strength rather than weakness. Maiga claimed that "we have a group of very experienced leaders; we have a plan for society."

¶111. (C) Maiga suggested that by failing to develop and articulate distinct and clear political positions, the political parties had ceded the terrain to other social groups. Citing the recent controversy over the Family Code, for example, Maiga argued that Islamic groups and other sectors of civil society had grown in power and influence precisely because the political parties have not been articulating a clear, alternative message (see ref tel). Maiga noted pointedly that "except during election season, no one hears from us."

